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The people in these poems are in constant interaction with each other and/or the world outside or indoors. Like currents of air colliding and mixing in the atmosphere, the internal and external worlds depicted here are both controlled and uncontrollable.

HUMAN WEATHER

by

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Approved by

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## APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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*Fling the emptiness out of your arms  
into the spaces we breathe; perhaps the birds  
will feel the expanded air with more passionate flying.*

—Rainer Maria Rilke, translated by Stephen Mitchell



## CUMULONIMBI

As we emptied the rooms of our lungs of smoke,  
the living room ceiling collected clouds around green  
paper lanterns. Notes from a bass guitar already  
thickening the air, I felt like the clouds would burst  
with hail, that the stones would star the glass table  
and scrape our cheeks. My friend sat beside me  
in a short dress, her tights a net of black flowers  
catching the slender birds of her legs. We whispered  
our opinions on fidelity while men laughed loudly  
in another corner. When her boyfriend approached  
with his lighter, she crossed her legs and her dress rode up.  
Though my brain was crowded with fabric, I noticed  
how he noticed her and tried to hide his excitement:  
crouching down, his left arm in front of his waist  
as he lit all the candles around us. During the illumination  
of the third or fourth tea light, my hand went under her thigh  
and squeezed her spare flesh and muscle. When I realized  
what I was doing, I inched away and saw him smiling at us.  
She only looked at him, hadn't moved or said a word,  
as if it were natural for me to touch her while his hands  
were full. I exhaled. Then, someone opened the door,  
and the smoke trailed out of the room.

## EL RÍO MANU

Just below the equator, night fell in minutes.  
The sun dropped to the Manu's surface  
then eased into the water, and the whirl  
of insects grew louder as shadows deepened.

Summer floods made an inverted forest  
of the river: roots crawled starward,  
and branches reached for richer earth.  
I was on the wrong side of Earth to be near you.

The sun blazed where you were  
and you must have sweat, while Venus shone  
so close to me that it reflected on the water,  
trailing light that led to shore. I shivered

as the blue-black Manu became our bedspread,  
fallen trees flattened into our floors,  
an eddy by a branch curved like your frown,  
and my guide's shoulders turned into yours

as he stood at the stern and swung, from snag  
to snag, the only artificial light for miles.  
He slowed the boat, the motor now  
a purr. I looked for jaguars.

Later, when we passed through  
the last town for fuel, the only woman  
on the beach without a baby in her arms  
begged us to look for her son's body,

but we only saw caiman in the water, their eyes  
shining red in the flashlight's beam.

## INTERSTICE

When you and I danced in your living room  
that muggy 3 a.m. when he was out of town,  
our feet kicked up clouds of shag carpet.  
We shaped them into maroon snowballs  
and fought, but they broke in the air.  
For a moment, I only wanted you  
and to paint the color falling around us.

I read your letter in the bath tonight  
and didn't think of him once. I have to  
tell you the last page fell before I finished.  
The water quickly obscured your words,  
turned the ink to charcoal, the letter  
into a sketch of what's inside your skin.  
It was almost like being with you.

You have enough virtue to ask me a question  
I've just asked you and mean your wonder.  
Like when I touch your shoulder, you touch  
my shoulder. When you drove me home  
that early morning, I shuddered, feeling  
the thought of it move my hand closer to  
the gearshift: I could stroke your little finger  
with mine and no longer be his.

## SEEKING SCARLET IBISES

Three shapely waitresses at the hotel restaurant  
sweat in long black dresses with white ruffle trim.

*The first ibis we saw was alone. It fed  
on a black mudflat under a mangrove tree.*

On the cab ride to the swamp, I see stray, mixed breed  
dogs in the streets stare at me and lick their wounds.

*The ibis's beak dripped  
a black curve to the ground.*

Outside the city, blue, green, and yellow buildings  
brightly fall into bald dirt roads.

*Our boat came to a clearing  
and stopped to watch the trees bleed with birds.*

The driver says his grandfather carried burning  
sugarcane at Carnival. Today, they remember by dancing.

*Among the hundreds of ibises in the breeding colony,  
our guide spotted a yellow-crowned night heron.*

On the dash, a sticker of the Trinidadian flag:  
a black stripe, lined with white, across a red body.

## MONITION

The German scuba instructor  
is trying to hold your hand.  
A tube in your mouth,  
you cannot tell her breaths  
are thinning and ears won't clear.  
You swim ahead and startle purple  
fish, then hang there and let the current  
carry you over broken mattresses  
of coral. How long before  
lungs won't fill with air?  
No sharks, enough oxygen  
in your steel tank, but still  
you are so close to the girl  
in the nightmare your father dreams  
right now, the daughter the scuba company  
lost in the sea. His dream-self  
shoots the officer who could not find you  
in the heart.

                  Tired of forcing breath,  
you rise too fast, shocking the air,  
the nose of your mask full of blood.  
Your father didn't know about  
your cold or daydreaming  
during the lesson, but somehow  
he knew the pressure in your ears  
was like hard-packed earth.

## DIALOGUE

### I. Stimulus

His vocal cords are thick with elastic tissue. Pharynx, oral cavity, skull sinuses, and thoracic cavity: all abnormally large. Jaw juts forward, neck muscles tense, side ribs collapse, and with a push of air, his vocal folds vibrate *I'm glad you're here*—glottis opening and closing, thyroid cartilage bobbing, tongue tapping his hard palate.

### II. Response

Waves hit my auricle and slide down ear canal until they hit the drum. Its membrane moves the malleus, which pushes the incus, which drops the stapes footplate into the oval window, rippling fluid in the cochlea. Spiral ganglion sends the message to cerebral cortex. Bursts of hormones stimulate ovaries; dopamine and norepinephrine flood hypothalamus. I tremble slightly, sweat, dilate, and say nothing.

## REDEMPTION

How many cameras have persuaded  
average people to undress?  
Neither of us has done anything  
like this before. If I weren't  
in love with your best friend, this would be  
even less sexy: you stand  
far from me, and every part of you  
looks bored. You appear perfect  
for our tired pose: Adam and Eve  
in the Garden, or rather,  
the woods behind condominiums,  
at dusk. Grasping at avant-  
garde, our photographer friend has left  
the white sticker on the Red  
Delicious and put a Lucky Strike  
in my hand. I was thinking  
I would never see anything new  
again, and then it happened:  
when you reached to light my cigarette,  
your hand shook above my breasts—  
it was windy—for a good minute.

## GROWN GIRL

My father told stories about my childhood  
last night, spoke as if I had not been there,  
then said, "That little girl could walk into this room  
right now, and I would know her." White-blond  
hair with thick, blunt bangs, crooked teeth,  
that yellow dress with buttons, my child-self  
walked through the restaurant to our table,  
but I did not know her. What did she want?  
Like all children, she was on to me  
and made me nervous. She looked around,  
then back at Dad, and absently held out her arms.  
As he lifted her onto his lap, her elbow knocked  
my wine glass over. *Daddy, I want to go home.*  
He kissed her enormous cheek, stood,  
set her on his shoulders, and walked out  
of the restaurant, through the parking lot,  
out of my sight. I knew where they were going.  
In my parents' house, the grown girl  
hangs on the wall few places, while the little one  
plays under cherry trees in Easter dresses  
or wades in tidal pools in bright bathing suits  
in every room. I like the one where she stares  
at a drip castle she made as if it were all she'd lose  
if she walked out of the frame and aged.



## SAY IT AGAIN

When I left you and returned to him, he said  
I breathed and spoke louder than before. I thought  
of couples who live by waterfalls and grow deaf  
from listening to the constant rushing. They fight  
without fighting, screaming even terms of love  
so they can be heard. Your mind and mine were noisy  
for months, and when thoughts of those we'd left drove  
us mad in bed, we would joke so desperately  
and laugh, mid-kiss, in each other's mouths: your voice  
inside my voice, a sound wholly ours. Now,  
if he were to stand at the other end of the house  
and say that he forgave me, I wouldn't hear him.  
Though everything is quiet, I can still feel  
your breath clouding around my ear.

## FEARS

She fears the small things and the large things,  
but mostly the small things.  
This morning, that the high, hook lock  
on the bathroom door will puncture her eye  
when she's running out in a hurry.  
She's in no hurry now, so it shouldn't threaten her,  
but it does: no one else in the house  
but the wheezing cat. It could die today,  
or the plane carrying the man who loves her  
could crash. He missed their Valentine's dinner  
because of a death in his family,  
and she was more upset that he couldn't come  
than she was about his grandfather's heart attack.  
She fears she is a very bad person. Sometimes,  
things happen to her that would only happen  
to someone else, like when that car ran the red light.  
As she washes last night's dishes and notices  
a web in the window's corner,  
she thinks of how she does not fear spiders,  
snakes, crowds, or heights, but instead ice,  
sunburn, chicken, children, taxes, identity theft,  
syphilis, HIV, emphysema, hearing loss, cancer,  
dementia, tornadoes, lead paint, gas stoves,  
slugs, fires, rashes, broken glass, that she is not in love,  
that her tires will suddenly go flat, that everyone  
will discover she's a fraud. She fears she will be punished  
and remembers her dream from the night before:  
her breasts became the breasts of a possum.  
There were thirteen of them, and they were furry.  
She would put her hands there and discover  
that the possum-breasts had gone. Then, she would  
touch herself again, and find they had returned.

## RUNNER SMOKER

### I. Along the Creek

Only crows and squirrels, though I know  
a barred owl lives here, and a Cooper's hawk.  
If you run at night a possum will come  
for your ankles just before the finish.  
My lungs are petrified tree stumps, flaking  
in my chest all winter. It's almost spring.  
I run through bars of poplar shadows  
and pretend I'm going somewhere.

### II. Around the Lake

Erosion turned one stretch to moonscape.  
Roots above the little beach flaunt broken bones  
and hunger. If the lake were as silky as it looks,  
I would lie in the middle of it, but when I cross  
the wooden bridge, the sewer's smell stings my eyes.  
The heron must have caught something by now.  
If I let myself cough, a moth will flap in my throat.  
I can wheeze as well as any goose can hiss.

### III. Through the Neighborhood

Septic tanks hide inside plastic rocks,  
while daffodils whisper about the newlyweds  
on Fairview. When you see a woman walking  
six dogs of six different breeds, you know they don't  
belong to her. Workers left a hole in the sidewalk  
big enough to fit a Deepfreeze full of filet mignon.  
The owners of the biggest house have been building  
that limestone patio for a year and won't let me use  
the porter john. I will not blow my nose in my shirt.  
Not here. Brick, stone, vinyl siding, and still this block  
has made up its mind: *Drive carefully. We love  
our invisible children.* My heart is going to explode.

## UNDERWATER

*Suckers are distinguished by the mouth,  
with protrusible lips,  
on the underside of the head.*

In Week 3, after a bed-shaking blow-job,  
Mr. Weakchin told her he still wasn't over  
Whatsurname. In Week 10 he was, in Week 11  
he wasn't again. She put him behind her,  
then discovered he'd stolen cash from her wallet.

*Unlike carp, the silvery, deep-bodied  
carpsucker has no spine  
in the dorsal fin.*

Her first lover, The Cokehead, gave her  
Chlamydia, back when they called it VD.  
Years later, she returned as his mistress,  
fucking him on the mirrored kitchen table  
a tongue could grow numb from licking.

*Females spawn up to 300,000 eggs each,  
which are broadcast over gravel shoals  
or deep stretches of sand.*

Never missed a period, though she wasn't  
on the pill or always careful. At the bar  
she tended, if a pregnant woman  
snuck sips from a friend, she'd refuse  
to serve the party another drop.

*Generally sluggish, they suck up detritus,  
invertebrates, and plants from the bottom  
of lakes, rivers, and slow streams.*

Her last boyfriend left her for good at dawn.  
As he slammed the back door, she remembered  
a painting from a hole-in-the-wall shop: a man  
firing a gun into a barrel of mullet, bits of fish  
and bloody water splashing onto his white T-shirt.

## LOOKING GLASS

Birds that die from flying into windows  
must see more of their favorite feeders  
reflected, more of their favorite trees,  
and they must want it all, more of the same.  
Or maybe the cardinal wants to be so close  
to a bird like her that when she meets her,  
hard and fast, the oblivion she finds  
on the ground in the stunned, shaking ball  
of herself is like nothing she's ever felt.  
Whichever it is, I know, despite those subtle  
dustings of red, she is free of vanity.

I remember my mother banding a female's  
gray-pink ankle while the bird came to.  
She flew away uninjured, only to smack  
back into the window again and again.  
We buried her in the yard near our yellow-eyed  
black cat, but didn't mark the grave. That night,  
Mom read me a story about a wicked queen  
who made herself beautiful with magic.  
She owned thousands of mirrors,  
but when the young virgin triumphed,  
the queen's mirrors turned black.

I no longer know where the cardinal rests  
in the red earth. A grave without a headstone  
is a room without a mirror, without anything  
to say, *Here you lie. Here, you lie.*

## THE ANNIVERSARY REACTION

This scene, this red table, tiled kitchen,  
bay window—I didn't know it a year ago today.  
The cast, too, has changed, but the pain I felt then  
is the same. The gravel in my stomach that came  
when it grew cooler, and everything green  
announced it would like to die.

\*

The lovers on the screen are screwing  
in the backseat, somewhere near  
a Mexican beach, and we are holding hands  
under a goddamn blanket. The subtitled film  
clears out the party in early morning,  
and you follow me to my room, but we don't  
take off a thing before easing into bed.  
I tell myself we're safe: him far away,  
his picture turned to the wall, us, just trying  
to sleep. Still, my hand shakes, sliding from  
your side to your stomach. I will it to stop.

Cut to the next party: I'm with him,  
you're with her. We barely look at each other,  
but don't touch them at all, our hands holding  
drinks and cigarettes. You dance with her  
like she's your sister; I try to dance with him,  
but my body has become like stone.  
Late in the night, I see you talking to him,  
laughing, acting like you're just another man.

Cut to when everything green gets what  
it asked for and no one wants anyone  
anymore: me-him, her-you, you-me.  
Cut out my stomach and let something  
eat it and let me still feel it and you will have  
today, this hour, a year later, where I'm still  
in love—not with you, but with the model  
of heart I had at that time that zoomed in  
on the most foolish thing to do,  
and then there I was, already in the act.

SUNDAY

In a room filled with silent objects—  
    the digital clock, the computer, the phone—  
I stare at the same painting every night:  
    a man in squares, a woman  
in circles, tiled together in a kiss.

    I don't want to live with my chair, desk,  
or lamp anymore. All I see is pilled upholstery,  
    nicks on corners, and a sooty hole  
beneath the shade from a sickly-sweet  
    scented candle. Junk mail  
and clothing carpet the floor,  
    a cat guards every door,

and outside, the wooden stairs  
    to the apartment where no one lives  
creak in cold gusts. Thank God  
    they make a sound.  
After parting and closing the curtains, my eyes  
    make rounds again: the clock  
(through my water glass, time sharpens  
    to red knives), the computer  
(a colicky baby fallen asleep), the phone  
    (a jewelry box of questions).  
Our nights were not like this.  
    Back then, whole hours went by.

## REMEMBERING LAKE NAKURU

Salmon-colored feathers rotting away,  
bones splay against the open grave of dry,  
cracked clay that was once lake. The dead  
flamingos look like delicate dinosaurs.  
The equatorial sun shines on each phalange,  
metacarpal, ulna, and radius  
as they fly slowly into the earth.

A decade ago, I snapped my own photos  
while thousands of wings rose  
from the water, its surface full  
of birds and sky. The lake now half  
that size, the flock of carcasses grows.

I think I spot an Eastern Bluebird,  
put the paper down, and pick up  
my binoculars, but the bare saplings  
have become flamingo skeletons.  
It's such a warm day for mid-November,  
I'm thirsty and afraid. The bluebird  
does not startle when trucks drive by,  
blooming with black smoke.



## SEVERE WEATHER

In the arms of the hurricane,  
we slept standing up like horses.  
The sound of wind—  
the house on a train—knocked us  
to our feet every time we lay down.  
If rain were a blue tongue, then the storm  
was not eye, but mouth. It wanted us  
between its lightning teeth. At dawn,  
skeletal light slid between boards,  
shaking the windows, as if the devil  
beat his wife indoors. A worm crawled  
out of my stomach and inched  
to higher ground. You are no demon,  
but you frighten me when I'm afraid.  
Over the sea, the eyewall enclosed a calm,  
but your eyes could fell a sycamore.  
When it grew quiet, we embraced  
before looking outside.

## MAN OF THE DROUGHT

I love the smell of cheap metal—  
especially brass—  
as much as my cousin loves the smell of gas,

because it reminds me of rain.  
See the brass bed  
sitting on the curb? Its flowers of rust are dead.

In my dream last night, a tsunami was heading  
straight for this shit hole,  
so I buckled my body to a pole.

My potted daisy is dying  
on the outside  
but lives. It's beautiful how well it lies,

its orange courage. I wish I could let it die  
completely,  
but those two leaves are all the green I see.

I stopped washing my hands three weeks ago,  
and Aunt Gwen  
said she remembered when

I washed my hands constantly, and I said,  
*Do you*  
*have eyes? The only moisture is dew.*

In my dream, it was like a room of water  
walked through me  
and through the papery fields and trees.

While it walked, I held on to the pole  
and I felt no pain,  
and when it was over, it was as if it had rained.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LAUREN B. MOSELEY WRITTEN AFTER GOOGLING MYSELF  
AND FINDING HER

Are you still a scientologist?

Do you prefer *Laren* or *Loren*?

Would you recommend serenity of beingness, or is it kind of dull?

As of 1997, you were on a “Route to Infinity.” Did you reach infinity?

If so, how much did it cost you?

Do you enjoy poetry?

Do you believe aliens brainwash people using implants?

As a baby, did you eat cat food once or twice?

How do you know L. Ron Hubbard wasn’t an alien?

Does it drive you crazy when people pronounce it *Mossly*?

Do members who reach infinity get to ride on a rocket ship and see, from space, the  
symbol Hubbard had carved into New Mexico?

If so, which is better: the infinity symbol or the Great Wall of China?

Do you wear a watch?

Do you think you can beat me up?

Do you have children?

If so, did you feed them the barley baby formula Hubbard “picked up in Roman days”?

If so, did they get scurvy?

Did you always know you wanted children, or did you not want them as a teenager and  
then become unsure in your twenties?

Do you have a habit of cracking the bones in your neck and shoulders?

Did you know our family name means “one who came from a land infested with mice”?

How do you think you will die?

Are you happy?

Are you already dead?

If so, did your spirit travel to Venus and did the Venusians put it in a capsule and dump it  
into the Pacific off the coast of California?

Has your spirit already inhabited a baby's body?

If not, stay away from my unborn children.

## ON NOT BECOMING MY MOTHER

Late again, I wondered if I smelled like sex  
despite my shower, if I would stutter at lunch  
while telling my mother what I'd been up to.  
The parking lot I hurried across was littered  
with receipts and bottle caps, and the four-star  
restaurant she recommended began to resemble  
a hardware store as I drew closer: gray, flaking paint,  
a flat roof festooned with white lights made useless  
by the cloudless afternoon. *She's accomplished more  
this morning than you will all day. You didn't even finish  
your coffee.* And then, through the glass door, I saw her  
coming towards me from the dim dining room.  
*Look how excited she is to see you!* But it wasn't her—  
it was too bright—it was my reflection approaching me.  
Squinting eyes, blotchy skin, wet hair, wrinkled shirt.  
My mother's face fell, and I opened the door.

## WHITE WORLD

When we had just a film of hair on our bodies,  
my sister and I would rub our bellies

together before jumping in the tub. It was easy:  
tummies round, chests flat, no knowledge of sex

to make us blush, and only laughter driving us.  
We refused to wash without bubble bath.

Dad would suds our hair into bunny ears  
while I gave myself a hoary beard

and my sister perfected her foamy breasts.  
Then, we posed, listened to bubbles faintly pop,

and giggled at the creatures we'd become  
until Dad took the white pitcher from the basin,

poured warm water over our up-turned faces,  
and changed us back into his girls.

## OLIVIA ON THE DOWNBEAT

As she steps outside, the house leaves  
its gray shadows around her eyes, along  
her arms, but her mahogany hair brightens  
against the grass. Her backyard is a pen:  
fenced in, with no doors to the neighbors.  
She plants lollipops from the doctors  
in dusty soil, while rosebushes shake  
their multiple heads. The wind  
gives a thorn the hem of her dress—  
a gold, ruffly thing she won't take off.  
Thorns line her voice as she tries  
to get free, and the moment she does,  
the little boy next door announces,  
“She's so pretty!” from a second-story  
window. His mother waves. The girl  
digs up a green lollipop, wipes it off,  
and reaches above the fence. She can't  
see his house anymore—only pine slats—  
but hears a window close and a door open.  
Her mother yells that she needs her rest,  
and the house holds her in again.

## SLEEPING TOGETHER

I had you in a bear hug in my bed.  
Your barrel chest and deep back muscles  
rose and fell at first with the rhythm  
of a poplar tree in wind and then moved to  
the tempo of a child in a swing.  
I felt the exact moment you began to dream.  
The years fell away from you, your six-  
foot frame transformed into a small boy sighing  
in the nook of my neck and shoulder. I could not  
settle down, refused to miss a second of the glow  
around your body, or the feeling that you  
were finally at ease. When you woke up,  
I had already forgiven you for sleeping  
in my bed and never trying to sleep with me.



## LUCKY STRIKE

My darling Lauren, I love the way you cross your eyes  
when you look at me, the way you breathe me in  
and hold me like you don't want our time together to end.  
Yes, your lips are always dry and you use your tongue  
too much, but I'll let that all slide because  
you always come back to me. You may want to leave  
for good at times, but we both know you never will.  
Your family may disapprove, but they don't know  
the moments we've shared: those nights shivering together  
on the porch and blinking at the stars, all those quickies  
between classes we let everyone watch because we didn't care  
enough to stop. Just think of all the bars we've shut down,  
all the eyes we've brought to tears, and all the years  
that passed to prove that no one else can calm you down  
the way I do, not even beer. You know you can't think  
when you try to forget me, that you can't accomplish  
a thing, and that nothing else seems to matter.  
Come on baby, let's have a go. It's the magic hour,  
and there isn't a whisper of wind in the air.

## MACHU PICCHU

When we stepped off the bus, we saw white  
plastic tables and chairs, red Coca-Cola banners,  
a snack bar, a gift shop, and restrooms.  
I headed for the last, stood in line a quarter hour  
before two women cut as I approached a stall.  
After, I had to push my way through  
the Disney-thick crowd to find my group  
at the gates. We entered easily,  
with our special group rate, hiked  
five minutes up stairs in the earth,  
and there it was: the postcard shot.  
A lopped, sprawling pyramid of stone terraces  
carved into the top of the mountain,  
surrounded by mountains, each craggy  
but green and over 8,000 feet. Each terrace  
topped with green and roofless stone rooms.  
Treading on the grass were llamas,  
alpaca, and—what the postcard leaves out—  
1,000 tourists. It was noon, the peak time  
for visitors who didn't choose to hike four days  
on the Inca Trail and arrive at sunrise to see  
the mountains glow, the clouds part,  
and the gold god fill the windows  
of the Temple of the Sun. I could have spent  
hours alone, before the first buses unloaded at ten.  
Instead, we plodded behind one another as if trying  
to exit a Stones concert after the last encore.  
Our guide yelled over the crowd's chatter  
about how we could feel the rock's energy here  
at the Sacred Plaza, where llamas and virgins  
were sacrificed. I felt nothing but the sun's heat.  
We stopped to rest, clicked our digital cameras.  
My father had me pose near a precipice with my sister,  
then mother, then mother and sister.  
I would not sit on the altar.

Where were the condors Neruda saw?  
I spotted wrens and flycatchers, heard bits of Spanish  
over a torrent of English, had drunk all my water,  
and the beauty of the weather would not stop.  
We didn't have time to climb Huayna Picchu,

and I told no one I was relieved.  
Our last stop was the Sacred Rock, shaped  
like the mountain behind it, where we could make  
an offering to the Incan gods by pouring out water  
from our plastic bottles. I heard my father mumble  
to my mother that he would not, that it was sacrilege.  
Standing with his arms folded, craning his neck  
to behold the mountains, averting his gaze  
from the rock, he looked afraid of its holiness.  
I would have emptied my bottle if I had a drop left.

## SUMMER

You told me two things while we walked through the gardens:

1. If you could be any animal, you would be a bear,  
and 2. My hair was the color of a wilting magnolia.

It was the last day of good weather. At sunset, empty bottles  
of beer and wine glinted everywhere. I banged a tambourine  
till my fingers bled. You played guitar and we didn't argue.

I noticed cuts from the jingles in the morning, staring at my hands  
while you cursed and threw unbreakables because you broke  
a yolk in the pan. It rained all day—bullets of hail in the evening.

We bought tomatoes of every odd color that afternoon:  
orange, yellow, green, purple. I was afraid to say I wanted red,  
so we got the ones you chose and ate their mealy flesh.

Your moods made me want to shake you like an apple tree  
and watch every memory we made fall to the earth. We didn't even  
make it to autumn, cicadas still buzzing fiercely for their mates.

## MAGGIE IN AMERICA

The woman cuddled with a gun's muzzle  
on a blanket of wet wool. Her husband's old boots  
slouched on the hearth, their skin peeling off,  
the eyelets full of firelight. Outside, snow fell  
but would not stick, while a film of it crept  
to the iceless river. The woman remembered  
when winter was real, when as a girl, she tunneled  
in the snow and skated on lakes with her brothers.  
No letters from them in what felt like years, now that  
she measured time with clutchings of the little cross  
around her neck. She can't grasp the candles' shadows,  
the baby's screams and coughs, or her husband's  
hard movements through the house the few hours  
each day he strayed from work. Maybe he finally  
sawed his hand off. She reminded herself that he  
was good: got them out before the famine, watched  
his whiskey, and didn't hit her, no, wouldn't dare  
touch her anymore. Her face was turning into potatoes.  
Her bowels shrank as her baby reddened in the crib.  
A doctor would bring another disease. The woman's heart  
pumped like she wished the trigger would.

## APOLOGY

Remember the beginning.

You carried a knot of orange and red electricity inside you, and it grew as you looked at the world and saw him everywhere. Now, the two of you go at it, daring the other to sink further into that character only Mother and Father know, that child screaming, *I hate you*.

When you find what you've been looking for—the worst thing he ever did—you exaggerate and hurl it at him. He fights back, yelling insults you never knew he thought but know are true. These are the moments when the worst side of you appears in the starkest light and demands the other to see it.

Weeks later, he comes over to get his things.

By some grace, anger's fire is the hardest to maintain, and in a fit fueled by the last of it, you find yourselves back in your old bed.

The contours of his body are somehow new, and you kiss more on the mouth this time.

Instead of trying to prevent it, you both laugh when the bed creaks the same way it always creaked, and it's the loveliest sound you've ever heard.

When everything is quiet, you whisper into his close face, *I'm sorry*.

*I made a horrible mistake*. And he says, *I didn't mean what I said*. As he turns over to stare at morning through the window, the bed creaks so faintly it sounds like a whimper.

## READING THE WIND

Two packages arrived at my door  
in the hour evening fell.  
It was a night of good fortune,  
the air smooth and warm for winter,  
but the wind blew harder  
than it had all year: branches waved,  
newspapers flew, and chairs  
lay on their sides, groaning.  
It whispered the words of a palm reader  
who held my hand the night before:  
*Look within.* And the wind blew  
without me, but also within.

## PALIMPSEST

I fell for him when he was seventeen,  
though we met when he was twenty-nine.  
His teenaged self in pictures looked as green  
as a sapling. Skinny, goofy, long-haired, and high,  
he looked like someone I would have loved  
at that age. As we went through a box  
of photographs, I watched his muscles, hair,  
and ego grow. He was lovelier than trees above  
his radiant face, or the rapids and rocks  
he kayaked over, suspended in white air.

In his mid-twenties, a beautiful brunette  
appeared by his side in almost every shot.  
They cooked in his apartment's kitchenette,  
sun-bathed and drank on her uncle's yacht,  
and danced and smiled at friends' weddings.  
He asked her to marry him, but she said no.  
Now, his hair's cut short, he's lost his tan.  
Some mornings he acts like the sun is setting.  
But when I look at him, I see and know  
the boy he was, though I love the man.



## THE RIVER IS THE SEA

Whenever I walk along a city's river at night,  
I am reminded of a man whose name I never knew.  
I remember his face, a sharp, shadowed thing,  
not because I desired him, or because the moon  
shone on the river in a way I'll never forget—  
I did forget it—but because this man desired me  
with violence and ugliness. I was in a European  
city for the first time, but I had spent my life  
walking along flowing water. The creek  
behind my childhood home marked my kingdom,  
and though I waded to my knees, played  
with pieces of trash, and crossed the gully  
on fallen trees, I never broke a bone or bled.  
But the man by the river in that city pushed me  
against the railing, shoved his hand beneath my shirt,  
and would not let me go. For three seconds. Statues  
on the nearby bridge looked in other directions,  
and somehow, no people passed. Those seconds  
were a lifetime, or, I thought, the end of mine.  
I said no in every language I knew.  
He was small, but so strong that when I moved,  
I did not move. I didn't know when I screamed  
he'd let me go. Never underestimate the music  
of a woman's scream: the sound the river would make  
if it did not wish to go to the sea, if every current  
resisted and turned around. Running back to my room  
down the cobble-stoned street, I promised  
to get to where I wanted to go, to what the girl  
dangling her feet above the creek dreamed of.  
The river does want to go to the sea  
because the river is the sea. Rushing past buildings  
that late hour, and even now, I am the river:  
a gathering of water made beautiful,  
not by the moon, but by how I will not stop.